

Section III

WORDS OF WISDOM

In writing and sharing their stories communities identified strategies or processes that contributed to building a healthy community. The following are some observations from the healthy communities members.

"People have difficulty changing. It takes a crisis to keep them from stepping back into old habits."

"...need to build awareness, create a vision. Communities need leadership to serve as the spark plug and for community to stay close to the spark plug."

A visioning experience "can be a powerful experience to establish a mission statement. Veil after veil lifted."

"WHAT YOU BELIEVE, YOU BECOME"

THE SPARK / CATALYST:

Awareness of a crisis or serious problem can provide a strong motivation to community members to learn more about the issue or problem, to come together to do something about the problem. The way the information is shared about the problem or concern can be effectively handled by considering the culture of the community. Eramosa found a creative tool through developing and performing a play. The spark can unite communities - even "difficult communities".

VISIONING PROCESS:

Participants describe the visioning experiences as "inspirational". The visioning process allowed the participants to "discover" that there were others who held similar values, and that they could work together - we gained "a belief that we can build something together". Community members recognized that a powerful visioning experience solidifies the participants, but this can make it more difficult for new people to become connected. They suggested finding other groups to involve in a visioning process. They also felt a need to revisit their vision, and to validate it with their community. They found that a visioning process helped to bring intersectoral groups together.

BUILD ON CURRENT INITIATIVES, PRECEDENCE:

One strategy that was found to be helpful in getting started was to find links between the initiatives for the healthy community project and the work of existing groups within the community. Acknowledging the work of others and giving them credit for their accomplishments helps to build bridges into community networks. In large cities, these groups may indeed be the bureaucrats who are

"People who feel hope and faith want to bring the disenfranchised on board."

"We need to think of consultants as a resource rather than as experts."

"If people come together for an issue...that in itself is needed. Just being in attendance allows things to emerge."

"I wonder if that's all we really do. Some people wring their hands because we're not taking concrete action."

"Our 'meeting to meet' is like a social services dementia."

involved in this work.

HONOURING THE COMMUNITY:

We honour the community by recognizing the insight and wisdom within the community. Specifically, take time to listen to the stories of the community. Listen to participants retell the story from their own experience. The energy and optimism of a few founding members can generate great excitement.

As a steering committee, give information to a community, give encouragement and possibly strategies such as visioning, but allow grassroots leaders to emerge. One community member cautioned to be wary of outside consultants. Outside consultants can try to take away the community process and give 'their answers'.

STRUCTURING / SUPPORTING:

Community members recognized a sensitive balance in their groups and committees between task orientation, getting things done and group building or process issues. They recommended taking the time to invest in group development. However, this can become negative if group members feel this is "all we do". Clearly some community members have different expectations about the purpose of the meetings. For some, it is an opportunity to socialize with members of their community and to surface new ideas through the group experience. Others hope to be highly task-oriented, making plans and decisions that will lead to action.

CROSS-SECTORAL / INTERSECTORAL COLLABORATION:

Developing an intersectoral or cross-sectoral group can be a challenge. Individuals bring their own agendas, their own language and feelings of "turf". One helpful way to form such a group is to identify members using personal contacts. This helps to select group members based on certain interests and talents and

"Intersectoral groups can fear losing their own turf or fear being co-opted"

"It is important to recognize the creative tension of energizing intersectoral groups. You need to harness the dynamic energy for the group. Use it, don't deny it."

"Making space for people to do their own things, so if people need to roll up their sleeves, the means exist for them to do that. For people who need to share their ideas and values, the means exist."

who possibly have a working relationship with at least some of the other members. *Other strategies include:*

- Beginning with a process of visioning or brain-storming to generate some common or agreed-to guiding principles.
- Providing time for group members to get to know each other, especially for them to find the similarities and commonalities.
- Identify the commonalities but also value the diversity. The real strength of intersectoral groups is in the different perspectives each can bring to the issue.
- Set ground rules that members must be positive - no put downs. No sarcasm. No we-they's.
- Find common ground, set common goals, develop a common language.
- Listen to differences, recognize sectors' bottom lines. Try to recognize the situations or contexts others are in.
- Work hard to build in an experience of success - engage in a task initially that can be accomplished by the group. Remember the difference between consensus and unanimity. Avoid attempts to homogenize discussions.

BUILDING CAPACITY:

Community members suggest many ways to build capacity within the community.

- Develop an inventory of skills within the community.
- Find what you need by redirecting resources - funds, time, materials.
- Actively involve the media.
- Train facilitators - develop others with collaborative and process skills.
- Try cooperative placements as a component of training - can address the need to involve the economically disadvantaged
- Directly following a powerful visioning workshop, ask participants to make a commitment, and to identify the resources and skills they are aware of in the community.
- Consider apprenticeships for skill training.
- For Steering Committee volunteers, offer mileage, small honorariums, child care.

"The traditional hierarchy has politicians as THE leaders with community groups at the lower part of the hierarchy. A community model honours the emerging community as a significant group."

"You can often find power in untraditional places. In large cities, bureaucrats have the power and they can increase the momentum leading to real change."

- Have sign language, interpretation services available.
- To keep the process alive, maintain the “passion of the cause”. Respond to the feeling level - (don’t get too intellectual) - encourage and maintain emotional commitments.
- Not everyone is good at or enjoys the same thing. To maintain interest and support, allow people space to do their own thing. Start differentiated groups. Validate the different roles of group members.
- Encourage the exploration of new roles.
- However, the healthy communities process can set up some false expectations. The community is not in control of everything. There is a power structure and bureaucracy that can block development.

PROJECTS :

- Initially, plan simple projects that can guarantee success.
- Set realistic timelines for tasks, then pass the doing to others.
- Timelines can be negative if they pass without the task being accomplished. Participants can become discouraged. Timelines can also be restrictive.

WORKING WITH POLITICIANS :

Local government commitment is one of the main ideas in healthy communities models. Some of the healthy communities stories cited here included at least initial decisions not to “woo Council”. However, some of the communities found effective strategies in developing links with Council.

- Begin by trying to find politicians who are committed to the issue. These are your “champions” and can assist in a number of ways.
- Find politicians who want to be connected to the community, or possibly start by approaching politicians through existing community groups. Use existing links. The other side of the equation is that politicians need to be involved. “They can’t lead in a vacuum”.
- It may be possible to involve Council in a visioning process.

Further, effective communication strategies may help your cause:

- Make the communication safe. Keep the facts concrete. Clearly document what is happening, develop clear objectives. Make the vision safe for politicians.
- Give hope to the politicians that it can work. It's not just pie in the sky. Help them feel positive and energized.
"OPTIMISM WORKS"

Working with Council may prove tricky. To "not bite the hand that feeds you", but to maintain independence, committees may benefit from an arm's length arrangement. For example, politicians on committees have a non-voting status.

A CAUTION: A healthy communities process can stall if a group asks for permission from politicians, then waits for an answer.

Groups who are having difficulty reaching or getting commitment from Council are encouraged to look for power elsewhere.

LETTING GO:

Initiating the work of building a healthy community requires a very special sort of leadership. However, part of the leadership skill is recognizing when it is time to "let go". At this time if the movement is going to grow, the originators may need to give up ownership and allow the community to take over the work. There may be a purist or elitist feeling with some seeing themselves as the true believers. They may try to exclude certain individuals or groups, such as the business community.

It may be at this time that politicians join the cause. Let the politicians get involved with the ground swell. Communities need to realize that it is normal for a community to initiate, then for politicians to play catch up. However, it is hard for original members if Council or funders "steal" the process and assume ownership once things are on track and working. Letting go at the right time may be the best way for the process to broaden and thrive.

"We need to let go. We tend to hang on when what we need is to give up ownership."

"I was angry when I saw a politician using our words until I finally realized he wasn't stealing our words but repeating them. It is another example of letting go."

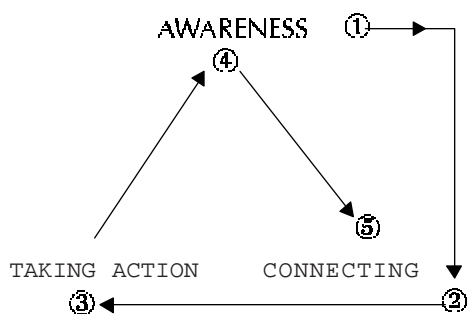
Section IV

A FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Many of the stories from these communities demonstrate a process that seems to gain a life of its own. They appear, at least from the outside, to be self-perpetuating. One possible explanation is that these healthy communities are following a positive cycle or process; one that continually renews and energizes the working group.

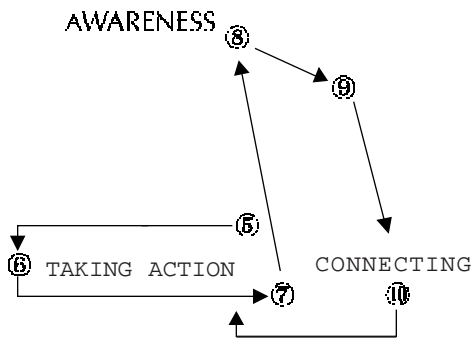
The components identified by the healthy communities can be grouped into one of three areas. There are strategies that raise AWARENESS, processes that help people CONNECT by forming groups and building teams, and many ways to TAKE ACTION.

From the stories there appears to be some flow through each of these areas. The following provides a generic example of a healthy community process and a pictorial representation of a framework:



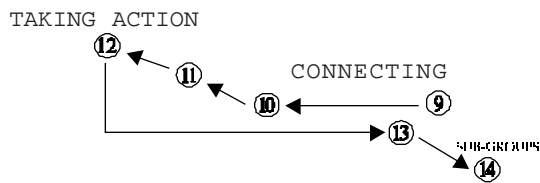
- ① Initially there is an awareness of a problem in the community,
- ② A number of individuals see this as a problem and come together to discuss it.
- ③ When there is some common interest and desire and talent, they may set some task for themselves to accomplish.
- ④ One such task may be to do reading or research which is eventually communicated back to the community.
- ⑤ Other community members may come out to hear the findings from the original group, or upon learning of the problem may also join the group. The group expands.

SECTION IV - A FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



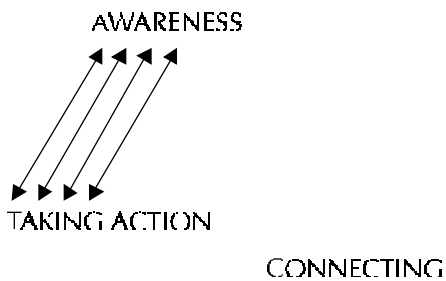
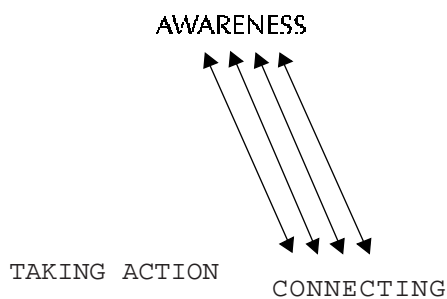
- ⑥ This more diverse group may decide they need to share their visions of a healthy community and thus set as their first task, the conducting of a visioning workshop for members.
- ⑦ The visioning workshop takes place and serves to connect the existing members around their vision and this shared experience.
- ⑧ The power from the experience leads them to communicate this vision-through written materials, the media, or possibly open forums.
- ⑨ With the clarity of the vision, more individuals and perhaps even politicians begin to identify with the cause and become linked, in some way.
- ⑩ The vision also provides suggestions on some specific tasks that the group can accomplish. New task groups are formed.
- ⑪ The new task groups also go through a process of getting to know each other, setting goals, clarifying roles, and other connection type activities.
- ⑫ Their mandate, though, is action. Once they are started they begin various tasks which may then be publicized to a broader community through the members or possibly through the media.

AWARENESS



- ⑬ Once task groups form, there is often a need to have a coordinating group. This may indeed be the original group, or some combination of early and more recent members, but they too go through a process to identify their roles and mandate.
- ⑭ Tasks for the coordinating group may include maintaining links to the various sub-groups, possibly seeking funds to enable the actions of the task groups, and lobbying.

To carry the “model” further, there may be situations when a community finds itself in a holding pattern, needing a spark to get the process moving again. There may be a number of predictable difficulties encountered by community groups.

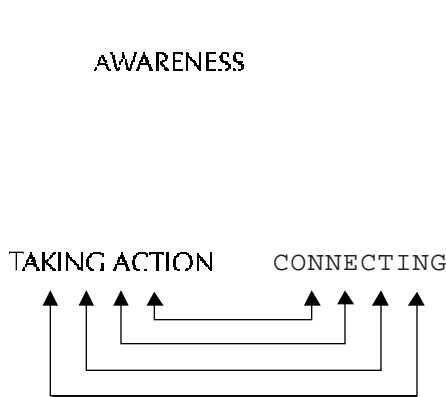


“WE KNOW TOO MUCH”

One such situation could describe a group who spends considerable time and energy researching the problem, and becoming an extremely well informed group. They may find that over time unless they move beyond awareness and connecting some members may feel frustrated that “nothing is happening”, and leave the group. Sometimes groups in this situation become overwhelmed with the complexity of the problem they are facing and lose their initial energy and enthusiasm. What this group needs to do is to take on one small project and see it through to completion. The group needs to see that they can do something to make a difference. The spark may come from an inspirational article or speaker, an enthusiastic new member, an idea formed from group deliberation.

“I DO. I DO. I DO.”

A second type of problem can surface with task groups. They may spend a great deal of time doing things and will, perhaps lose sight of the needs of the individuals involved. Especially with highly motivated volunteers, a real danger exists of “burning out” your most committed people. A further risk is that this group becomes a highly focused, very effective task group, who may be miles ahead of the rest of the community. Because they are so busy they have little time to develop new members. They can lose touch with the other groups, be perceived as self serving or unapproachable. They may become unable to renew themselves.



"WE'VE GOT THE ANSWER"

Another type of difficulty can occur with communities who are very action-oriented, yet support new and existing members. In this situation, they are so nurturing of one another that they underestimate the need to share what they are doing with the broader community. Although they feel very gratified with their work and accomplishments, they are at risk of losing their broad community support - which may mean a loss of funding. Without community support or recognition for what they are doing, they may be (financially) unable to carry on their work.

HOW DOES THE FRAMEWORK FIT?

When people from healthy communities initiatives were invited to reflect on their experiences in light of this framework, a number of interesting observations were made.

1. Movement around the cycle goes both ways. Some actions, such as developing support structures contributed directly to forming connections between members. Similarly, connections between intersectoral groups led both to new actions and to increased awareness or new learning within their own departments or groups.

From the Sudbury story:

(From a planning process, eleven task groups were formed.)

"Two of the task groups; the natural environment group was chaired by Bob Rogers of the Laurentian University School of Movement and the healthy cities group, was chaired by Patrick O'Sullivan a health promotion professional. They noted the links between their two tasks and the interrelationship between health, economy and environment became a key concept."

From the Ottawa-Carleton story:

(The CAO saw the potential of the healthy community process to break down barriers between departments in the regional government.)

"The Official Plan is undergoing a major environmental review centred on the three overlapping concepts of sustainable development, ecosystems, and healthy communities.The Transportation Environment Action Plan encourages walking and cycling as part of a qualitative approach to the transportation system with a major public consultation component...."

2. A specific investment in the process helped to move within this framework. The role of a catalyst to help facilitate the group or an evaluation process helped groups continue to move and grow.

From Halton's Story:

"A Steering Committee was going to hold a visioning workshop in a local community to enable residents to describe what a healthy community meant to them. Unfortunately there was little interest in the workshop and it was cancelled. This was an important learning for the Steering Committee. Members realized that to implement its first goal of supporting local healthy community initiatives they were going to have to help local community groups and individuals become the champions of the initiative...."

3. Groups could spin off in each area: awareness leading to more awareness, one action leading to other actions, and connecting leading to new partnerships, with additional collaboration.

From the Woolwich Story:

[The Clean Waterways Group] "The enthusiasm of this group has mobilized community energies to accomplish an impressive amount of hard work. Some of their accomplishments include: a creek assessment day followed by an open house, preserving a maple tree and surrounding creek-banks, ...Their long-term goal is the creek's restoration, and the involvement of the Woolwich-wide community in a plan for the entire watershed."

4. One enabling characteristic is an environment where people can see the opportunities to take action because they see connections.

From Eramosa's Story:

"Perhaps because of the various power struggles within the community and its numerous conflicts, more and more diverse interests are joining together. The same people who were working on opposite sides of the fence three years ago are now working together in hopes of developing more open and honest government."

5. Initially participants from the community found it difficult to see the model as a whole because at times different parts become stronger and weaker. For example, at one stage, groups might be involved in intensive study and learning and see that as their total commitment. At other times, great energy and much time is spent on building a cohesive committee to oversee the process.

- The framework provides a way of looking at components in the process.

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- Its usefulness may be in offering communities another way to reflect on their current focus.
- The framework may be helpful in assisting community leaders to be aware of different components in the process of developing and forming a healthy community.
- If a process seems to be stalled, listen to the story others in your community tell.

Has the process focused on only one aspect in the framework, or has there been

awareness raising,

connecting, and

action.

Section V

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT STORIES

The Storytelling

From September 1992 until September 1993, a number of communities engaged in a healthy communities process wrote and shared their stories. The stories provided a way for communities to talk about who they are, to revisit the barriers and concerns and a chance to acknowledge and celebrate the successes.

The story telling process allowed a community to describe what happened from their own perspective. It provided a chance to explain what happened, to review their roles and accomplishments.

Stories were told in response to a number of open ended questions. A sample of these questions include the following:

PLACE	Where is the community located? What are some particular features of your community that make it special?
PEOPLE	Who introduced the concept of healthy communities in your community? Who are the leaders in your community?
VISION	What was the vision at the beginning of the process/project? Has the group developed a vision statement?
PROCESS	How does the group balance process and task?
STRUCTURE / ORGANIZATION	What brought your group together? How do you interest people in the community to join or become involved? How are decisions reached?
ACTIVITIES	What types of activities has your group organized? Have they been successful?

The complete list of suggested questions are contained in Appendix III.

What is a Good Story?

The Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre, (1994) has described a “good story” as having the following attributes.

A good story is one that, does one or more of the following:

- demonstrates a "success"
- demonstrates a "failure"
- was particularly stimulating for you or others
- was particularly perplexing or difficult for you or others
- offers some beneficial lessons for you and your colleagues about the work shop theme

To prepare a "good story" they advise story writers to:

Assume that your story-listener knows nothing about the context, setting or circumstances surrounding your story. Provide a lot of description:

- who was involved
- what actions you and others did
- when and where the actions took place
- what actions went smoothly
- what actions were problematic

Explain some of the reasons why you chose your actions:

- why the particular health problem was chosen
- how your actions on this problem promoted better health
- how your organization's structure and internal relationships affected what actions you chose
- how your organization (colleagues, superiors) and the program participants viewed your health promotion work (the feedback you received)

Offer some reflection on your own story:

- where there was consensus or disagreement about what should be done
- from your experience, what you would do differently next time
- why you would do it differently
- what you would need in terms of knowledge development to help you do it differently

from: "Sharing Knowledge From Health Promotion Practice: Workshop Orientation Manual"
Health Promotion Directorate, Health Canada - Fall 1994

One participant said:

"The story is only a very small black and white snapshot. It's scary that people see it as a whole story."

"Our stories are our communities references about ourselves, what we've experienced. We look back at our history to inform the future."

REFLECTION ON THE STORY-TELLING PROCESS

At a working session in November, 1994, story writers and community members reflected on the story telling process.

Having a member of the community write the story was ideal. Her task was to listen to others and put their experiences into a context with other documentation. It was recognized that the stories were only a part of the total picture.

Although these stories can never provide "the whole story" - when they are told from the heart by a community participant they have "absolute validity", at least from that point of view. For one storyteller, the process of writing the story had great value. She had been very ill, in fact dying, before beginning the story. The storytelling became her "connection with life."

Another participant questioned if the story could stand alone. Communities may not want to share their troubles and struggles, and what is written is "a love story." Other questions were raised about honesty. Can community members, and members of professional groups share the negatives without repercussions? Would sharing of the struggles block support from politicians? If the story is told during a time of conflict, would it lead to an image and self-fulfilling experience of ongoing conflict?

Stories provide the opportunity for community members to share at a different level than statistics and facts. Personal perceptions and interpretations, perceptions of changes, how individuals understood the experience, can all be included in the story.

However, stories on paper may not communicate the excitement and multi-dimensional aspect of the experience. Ideally stories would be shared in a multimedia format. Individuals could share their experiences on video, pictures from the visioning process could be displayed, slides taken during task group activities such as a trail clean up could be shown, materials, books and references would be available.

"We need the story, a continuing one because we are moving to the next stage. We know what's gone before. Its so intriguing how events fit together like a solution to a puzzle. The timing is so significant, when this or that fell into place."

"Storytelling has helped us in finding our own path, in explaining our own healthy community project to others, and in giving those that need a pathway to their own destiny, a place to begin."

One community member talked about the story as, *"A point of pride" allowing "an external diffusion of pride."*

Because the healthy community process is ongoing, no story is ever complete. Updates by different members of the committee would help to keep the story current.

Another idea suggested by community members was to have a story which is a composite of many individuals' "vignettes". THE story, would be an unedited compilation of community members' stories. This would provide a vehicle for a broader understanding of different perspectives...a multi-dimensional snap shot.

In summary, community members shared a number of ways that the stories had been helpful to their communities.

Review and reflection

Stories provided a way for individuals to express what was important to them and to share feelings. Reflection about the story provided a way to look at the experience, possibly in a different way. The story also added insight at times about why things happened.

Communication inside community

The story shared with their own community allows members to publicize and obtain credit for their accomplishments. The stories are an important tool to inform all community members about the healthy community process and may indeed attract new participants.

Further, the story was also a useful tool for "new joiners", to help them understand what has already occurred, who has been involved, and why things have happened in the way they have.

Communication outside community

For a number of communities the story provided a useful tool for sharing the strategies that worked and the learnings that occurred with other communities. For some, the story was an important piece of documentation for potential funders.

Baseline for Tracking Changes

Reflections about the story helped both new and old members understand what has happened. In updating the story, it became evident who was left out of the original story. In updating the story it is possible to be more inclusive.

A final word from one of our story writers,

"We hope the stories and information included in this guide book help you and your community to continue healthy community processes. Needs and circumstances vary, of course, and every community is as unique as the individuals that inhabit it. Still, the three basic components identified in each of the stories told here are universal:

*AWARENESS of a particular problem or issue;
CONNECTIONS that bring community members together;
and finally,
ACTION to put the process to work."* (Mary Hetherington)